

Page Denied

Great article, telling one major reason why US Intelligence is often surprised: emphasis on "current intelligence" based on classified docs, while ignoring long-range trends for which classified info is rarely if ever needed.

Pat was on staff of Senate Foreign Relations Committee for perhaps 25 years, the last several of which (during Fulbright era) were as Chief of Staff.

CSM

Wednesday, January 3, 1979

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

23

OPINION AND COMMENTARY

US in Iran: ignoring the facts

By Pat M. Holt

The fact that the White House was surprised by the precariousness of the Shah's position in Iran is being deplored as a failure of intelligence. In fact, it is a more serious failure of political perception and analysis.

The excuse of the CIA for not giving the President a better national intelligence estimate of the developing situation in Iran is that the United States had so many ties, including intelligence ties, to the Shah that the CIA was precluded from trying to penetrate opposition groups and thereby find out what they were up to. This is true as far as it goes, but what it overlooks is that it should not have been necessary for the CIA to do this in order to know that things were not going well for the Shah.

That should have been apparent from open sources such as are available to the political sections of all American embassies, or to ordinary newspaper readers, for that matter.

Indeed, it was apparent to the State Department. In the bureaucratic haggling which went into the preparation of the faulty intelligence estimate, the department held out for saying so. The fact that the department did not prevail involves more than the lack of covert intelligence from opposition groups.

It involves, first of all, the tendency to assign greater weight to covert intelligence than to facts which are in the public domain. If intelligence sources within the Iranian Government are saying that all is well, there is a tendency to give this greater weight than headlines which anybody can read saying that orthodox Muslims are rioting all over the place.

There are, of course, situations in which covert sources and clandestine methods of collec-

tion provide the only way to learn something. But these have mainly to do with concrete details. They will tell you the day and hour that an uprising is planned. But ordinarily perceptive political analysis ought to tell you that a given situation is ripe for an uprising, a demonstration, or other political turmoil.

Such analysis was available with respect to Iran, but it was ignored because it was not backed up by covert intelligence and indeed was contradicted by self-serving reports from Iranian Government sources.

It was probably ignored for other more subtle and serious reasons as well. These can be summed up in the importance of Iran. This led the US, under seven presidents and over 30 years, to develop a relationship with the Shah which had within it, if not the seeds of its own destruction, at least the seeds of a growing dilemma.

Overlook the fact that the US restored the Shah to his throne through covert action in 1953. Overlook the fact that Nixon sent the former director of the CIA to be Ambassador to Iran.

The more troublesome entanglement comes from the fact that, in response to the Shah's insatiable demands backed by his seemingly inexhaustible oil wealth, the United States sold Iran \$20 billion worth of military equipment between 1950 and 1978. The most troublesome entanglement of all comes from the fact that, because this equipment was complicated beyond the capacity of the Iranians to use it, the US also sent 40,000 or more Americans to show them how. Simply by their presence, these Americans became hostage to US-Iranian rela-

tions and at the same time became a complicating factor in those relations.

In short, the Gordian knot of the US embrace with the Shah was too painful to cut and the prospect of an alternative to the Shah was too terrible to contemplate. So there was a reluctance to follow where the facts led. There was reluctance to irritate the Shah even by casual acquaintance and conversation with the opposition (yet the US Embassy in Moscow has an officer whose full-time job it is to cultivate contacts with Soviet dissidents).

The irony is compounded by the fact that, while US-backed governments abroad have usually gotten in trouble because they were too conservative, the Shah's opposition comes from orthodox Muslims who have actually managed to make him look liberal.

Mercifully perhaps, one cannot foresee how this sad tale will end, though the outcome is unlikely to be a happy one, either for the US or the Shah. It may well be too late to do much about it in Iran anyway — other than to try to learn the right lessons from this experience and especially to apply them elsewhere.

One lesson seems to be that in dealing with broad political questions common sense is worth more than covert penetrations of either governments or oppositions.

Another is that 20th-century technology, plus hordes of Americans, plus a 15th-century society make a volatile mixture.

It is not too soon to begin considering the case of nearby Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Holt is a free-lance writer on foreign affairs based in Washington.

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March 21, 1979

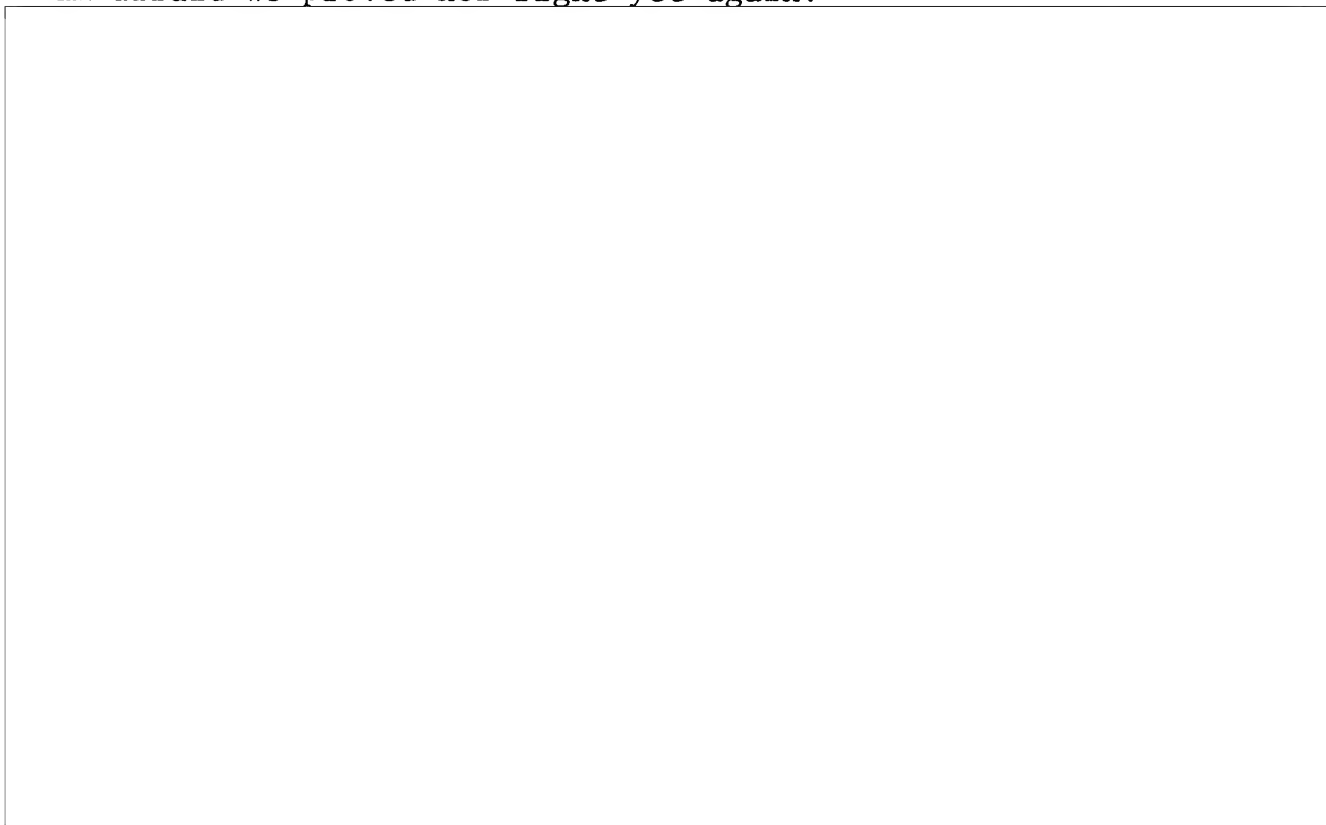
Dr. B. Vincent Davis, Jr.
Patterson School of Diplomacy
University of Kentucky
Lexington, KY 40506

Dear Vince:

We all enjoyed seeing you Saturday, and all of us feel the visit was extremely successful. I hope your trip to Crane was equally successful, and that the travel was not too arduous.

We also missed you Saturday evening, but there will, hopefully, be other opportunities to return the hospitality you have extended to us on so many occasions. As you know, Suzanne says that all sailors do when they get together is swap lies and drink too much. I am afraid we proved her right yet again.

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